

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SP-02 INR-07 NSC-05 DODE-00 CIAE-00

EB-07 TRSE-00 SS-15 /047 W

-----141530Z 063556 /40 S

R 141339Z JUN 77

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4292

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 2828

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE, SA, SY

SUBJECT: SYRIAN-SAUDI RIVALRY IN LEBANON

1. AS REPORTED IN BEIRUT 2785, FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS IN OUR JUNE 10 CONVERSATION PINPOINTED SYRIAN-SAUDI RIVALRY FOR INFLUENCE IN LEBANON AS ONE REASON SAUDIA WERE NOT FORTHCOMING WITH FINANCIAL HELP. PRESIDENT SARKIS, IN CONVERSATION

JUNE 13, REFERRED TO SAME COMPETITION AS BEING FACTOR DELAYING IMPLEMENTATION OF CAIRO ACCORD, RATIONALE BEING THAT SAUDIS WOULD NOT WANT TO HELP SYRIANS IMPROVE THEIR POSITION IN LEBANON BY ELIMINATING PALESTINIAN OPPOSITION. PUBLISHER OF AN-NAHAR GHASSAN TUENI DWELT AT LENGTH ON SAME THEME DURING LUNCHEON CONVERSATION JUNE 13. TUENI, WHO

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HAD SEEN PRESIDENT JUST BEFORE I DID, SAID THAT SAUDI RELUCTANCE FINANCE RECONSTRUCTION OF LEBANON, WHICH WOULD FACILITATE TASK OF SYRIANS, WAS WELL ESTABLISHED. HE SAID SAUDIS FELT MAINTENANCE OF ORDER IN LEBANON ONE THING AND STRENGTHENING OF LOCAL BAATH PARTY SOMETHING ELSE. HE NOTED THAT LOCAL BAATH PARTY LEADER ASSEM

KANSOU HAD CALLED FOR UNIFICATION OF LEBANON AND SYRIA IN RALLY IN BEIRUT ON JUNE 12.

2. WHEN I ASKED TUENI WHAT EVIDENCE HE HAD OF THIS RIVALRY, HE SAID SAUDIS WERE MOVING IN VARIETY OF WAYS TO ESTABLISH THEMSELVES AS AN INFLUENTIAL FORCE IN LEBANON. THEY WERE WITHHOLDING MONEY. THEY WERE AT SAME TIME INVITING SOME 20 LEADING LEBANESE PERSONALITIES TO VISIT SAUDI ARABIA. WE WOULD SEE OTHER SIGNS. (ONE OF THEM MAY BE THE FREE FOOD DEPOT SAUDIS HAVE SET UP DOWN THE STREET NEXT TO RIVIERA HOTEL. THEY ARE TRUCKING FOOD IN FROM ALL OVER AND PASSING IT OUT TO THE NEEDY, JUST AS THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT IS PHASING OUT ITS RELIEF PROGRAM.)

3. SAUDI-SYRIAN RIVALRY IS NOT NEW THEME, BUT IT SEEMS TO HAVE SHARPENED IN PAST SIX WEEKS. BOUTROS AND SARKIS, FOR INSTANCE, HAVE NOT MENTIONED IT TO ME BEFORE. WOULD APPRECIATE COMMENTS OF DAMASCUS AND JIDDA.

4. WITH REGARD TO FINANCIAL AID, PRIME MINISTER SALIM AL HOSS TOLD ME NIGHT OF JUNE 11 THAT SAUDIS AND KUWAITIS WERE GOING TO HONOR COMMITMENT THEIR RESPECTIVE FUNDS HAD MADE TO FINANCE SPECIFIC PROJECTS IN LEBANON. THEY WERE, HOWEVER, DRAGGING THEIR FEET ON PROVIDING FUNDS TO REFLOAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR. THIS IS SOMEWHAT BETTER THAN PRESS STATEMENTS HAD LED US TO BELIEVE.

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